

A Brief Statement on Educational Principle of the People’s Republic of China

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Abstract: China issued two educational principles in 1960s and 1990s respectively. Both are composed of three fundamental elements----general aim of education, concrete purposes of education and ways of realizing them. Both emphasize the combination of education and work as well as the all-round development of the educatee. The difference between the two is that the former stipulates that education should serve the proletarian politics and education of laboring people while the latter provides that education should serve the socialist modernization and cultivation of builders and successors of socialism.

Key words: early period of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) new era of reform and opening to the world educational principle

An overview of the fifty-year educational evolution of the PRC shows that there has been various statements on the educational principle; however, only two of them are typically representative and issued by the state government, which were published respectively in 1961 and 1995. The former is the educational principle of the early period of the PRC, and the later is that of the new historical period of reform and opening to the world. They show both consistency and difference in their forms and contents. Both of them carry with distinctive features of their times. Being two landmarks in the history of the PRC, they were the general guiding principles of education made by the central government; embodied the educational purposes in the different periods and played important roles in the activities of Chinese modern education.

1. Educational Principle of the Early Period of PRC

As early as in1930s, the Government of Soviet Region in China, led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), put forward the General Cultural and Educational Principle of People’s Power. Later, the governments of anti-Japanese regional areas and liberated areas raised similar principles. In 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded. The newly founded PRC carried on this tradition. At the end of this year, the Educational Department of the People’s Central Government held the first National Conference of Education in Beijing, at which the general principle of education of the early period of PRC was decided as follows: “The education of PRC is that of New Democracy, whose main task is to improve the people’s cultural standard, cultivate talents needed in the country’s construction, eliminate various ideologies related to feudalism, comprador capitalism and fascism, and develop the ideology of serving the people. This new type of education is a democratic, scientific and popular one, with the purpose of serving the people, especially the workers and farmers, as well as the

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revolutionary cause and construction at that time.”¹ In February of 1957, Zedong Mao gave a speech entitled “On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions among the People ” at the extended Supreme Conference of the State Council. In the speech, he pointed out, “Our educational principle should make those receiving education develop morally, intelligently and physically, thus enable them to become laborers equipped with knowledge and socialist consciousness.”² At another meeting in the spring of 1958, Zedong Mao said, “Education must serve the politics of the proletariat, and combine with production and labor. Laboring people should be educated, while the intellectuals should take part in labors.”³ In December of the same year, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council issued “the Directives on Education”, saying, “The Party’s educational principle is that education should serve the politics of the proletariat and be combined with production and labor. In order to realize this principle, education must be put under the leadership of the Party.”⁴ In 1961, permitted by the CCP Central Committee, the Educational Department combined Zedong Mao two speeches of 1957 and 1958 into one, and stipulated the educational principle of the New China as follows, “Education must serve the politics of the proletariat, combine with production and enable educatee to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become laborers equipped with knowledge and socialist consciousness.”⁵

Obviously, this is a socialist educational principle with Chinese characteristics. It takes Marxist educational ideas as its base for theories, basic conditions of the socialist China as well as its educational activities as the base for practice, and the basic principles of the Chinese Communist Party in the specific period as its base of policies. As far as its term is concerned, “educational principle” is used instead of “ educational purpose”, so that it reflects more accurately the essential characteristic of educational principle, which serves as the general line for a state power to develop its education; as well as embodies the state’s determination to develop education. As far as its content is concerned, it epitomizes the educational purport raised at the end of the Qing Dynasty, which is based upon pursuing the essential human qualities related to morality, intelligence and physique, the educational purport in the early period of the Republic of China, which is devoted to the educatees’ all-round development of qualities such as morality, intelligence, physique and aesthetics, and the educational purport in the late period of the Republic of China, which emphasizes that education should serve the Three People’s Principles. It combines such aspects of education as its nature, status, goals, tasks, content and approaches into one unity. As far as its nature is concerned, it not only inherits the fine tradition of the CCP’s general culture and educational principle of the New Democratism in the period of Democratic Revolution, but also keeps pace with the times, and carries it with the distinctive features of the times. It points out the direction for the Chinese socialist educational cause. Therefore, it has been used for decades and written into the Constitution of the PRC. In the history of PRC, its influence and the length of executive period are unparalleled.

2. Educational Principle of the New Historical Period of Reform and Opening to the World

At the end of 1978, the CCP held the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee. Based on the all-round self-criticism and examination of the politics that put forward after 1949, a general line and policy was

¹ Lirui Mao, and Guanqun Shen. (1989). *General history of Chinese education (six edition)*. Jinan: Shandong Educational Publishing House, 1989.7-8.134

² (1992). *Mao Zedong’s. discussion on education*. Beijing: The People’s Educational Publishing House. 258.273

³ (1992). *Mao Zedong’s. discussion on education*. Beijing: The People’s Educational Publishing House. 258.273

⁴ Lirui Mao, and Guanqun Shen. (1989). *General history of Chinese education (sixth edition)*. Jinan: Shandong Educational Publishing House, 1989.7-8.134

⁵ Feng Yun, and Xuanchao Zhu. (1991). *Discussion on the educational policy and law*. Beijing: The People’s Publishing House.136-137

established that “Focuses on the central task of economic construction, keeps the Four Cardinal Principles (adhering to the socialist road, the people’s democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thoughts, and the Reform and Open Policy). Against this background, a hot discussion about educational principle was held in the educational circle, focusing on a series of essential questions such as whether a new educational principle should be issued in the new historical period, what education should serve, whether education should continue to serve the politics of proletariat in the new time, whether the educational principle should still be that education combines with the production and labor, what kind of person should be cultivated, and the question of improving educatees’ “Three Qualities” (morality, intelligence and physique), or “Four Qualities” (morality, intelligence, physique and aesthetics), or “Five Qualities” (morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics and labor), etc. The discussion lasted for more than a decade. The result came into open initially and formerly in “The Proposal about the Ten-Year Project and the 8th Five-Year Plan” at the 7th Plenary Session of the 13th CCP Central Committee in December of 1990. It is expressed totally in 41 Chinese characters, saying, “Education must serve socialist modernization, must combine with production and labor, and cultivate socialist builders and successors featuring an all-round development in morality, intelligence, and physique.” In February of 1993, it was amended and supplemented in “The Outline of Chinese Educational Reform and Development” by the State Council. The word “drive” was added to “modernization”, thus to make “Education must serve socialist modernization drive”.⁶ Besides, the phrase of “combine with production and labor” was changed into “integrate itself with productive labor”. The other wordings remained the same. In March of 1995, it was further altered in “The Educational Law of the PRC” passed by the 8th Session of the People’s Congress. The word “etc.” was added to the words of “morality, intelligence and physique”. The words “socialist cause” were added before words “builders and successors”. The educational principle is expressed in the total of 53 Chinese characters, saying “Education must serve socialist modernization drive, must integrate itself with production and labor, so as to cultivate socialist builders and successors featuring an all-round development in morality, intelligence, physique etc.”⁷ By then, the second milestone of educational principle in the history of the PRC had gone through all legal procedures and was recorded into the essential law of education.

Comment about this educational principle was frequently seen in the past but has not been so frequently met in recent these years. First of all, it must be pointed out that this educational principle is a more developed and better one than the first educational principle in the historical era. As far as its content is concerned, the wording that “education serves the politics of the proletariat” is changed into “Education serves socialist modernization drive”. It is by no means a mere change in wording. It is a change based on a scientific conclusion reached after decades of generalizing theoretical and practical experience, both positive and negative, wide-range discussions and examinations. It fits the social reality of China, and embodies the brand-new understanding of general educational principle of the CCP as a ruling party. The principle that “education serves the politics of the proletariat”, a product of that particular period, had its inevitability. However, it had its obvious historical limitation. On the one hand, the multifunction of education was narrowed to a single function. On the other hand, education was substituted by politics, as its dependency and servant. It lost its independence and was led to a wrong direction. The principle that “Education serves socialist modernization drive” holds a much wider and fuller meaning. It can be viewed both from a static angle and a dynamic one. In its static meaning, it has the connotation that education serves various aspects of the society ranging from socialist material modernization progress and ethical modernization progress, including the modernization progress itself. In the dynamic meaning,

⁶ (1990). *The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China’s Advice on Formulating Ten Years Program and the Eighth Plan of Five Year of National Economy and Society Development*

⁷ (1995). *The Educational Law of the People’s Republic of China*. Chinese Educational Newspaper. 3.22

modernization could be regarded as a process. It is developing and passing through the whole course of the socialist drive. Although the two propositions are similar in the sentence structure, they are greatly different in the content, reflecting different ways of thinking, different understanding and expression about the law of education.

The slogan “Education should be combined with production and labor” was proposed early in 1934 by the Soviet power organ under the leadership of the CCP. As a basic principle of Marxist educational theory, it is the only correct way of cultivating persons developed in all-round ways and achieving the socialist educational goal. It is also the consistent and fundamental policy of the CCP. Although the concepts of “education” and “production and labor” are continuously deepening and widening, yet the combination of the two remains unchanged. In the new educational principle, this idea is preserved and faithfully stated.

The basic part that “cultivate socialist builders and successors featuring an all-round development in morality, intelligence, physique, etc.” remains the same as that expressed in the first principle, both stating those receiving education should develop in a full scale and become politically conscious and professionally competent. The difference between the two principles lies in the key names of “laborers” and “builders and successors”. During the decades of practice, the word “laborers” is usually comprehended as physical laborers in a narrow sense. In consequence, it is always misleading. Therefore, in the new principle, it is replaced by such wording as “builders and successors”. Relatively speaking, the second educational principle is more explicit, standardized and logical. It conforms more to such requirements of an educational principle as brevity and certainty. So far as the form of the two educational principles is concerned, both of them are composed of three basic elements---general aim of education, concrete purposes of education and the ways of realizing them. The general structures of them are generally expressed as “two musts” plus “one cultivate”. However, fewer Chinese characters are used in the second one. The total number of them is reduced from the original 59 to the latter’s 53, making the latter’s expression better and more scientific. The new principle provides a more accurate definition for the position of education of the socialist China. Therefore it adheres closer to the basic rule that education conforms to the development of the society and the people. What should be pointed out especially is that it will be undoubtedly more helpful for the standardization of educational activities to stipulate an educational principle by the way of law, and as the core content of “the Educational Law of the PRC”. Then it should be pointed out that since it is recorded in “the Educational Law”, it should be practiced legally and seriously, but it does not stop the further inquiry and discussion about it, such as how to understand “socialist modernization”, how to position “Education integrates itself with productive labor”, what is “all-round”, how to treat the structure of “two musts” plus “one cultivate”, and so forth. These questions all call for deep and systematic rethinking and research.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the educational history of the PRC for half a century, to some degree, is the development and vicissitudes of these two educational principles. They are the guides and witnesses of the development of the education of the PRC. As the central government’s implement to manage the education of the country, they have been the integral part and exclusively characterized cultural tradition of Chinese educational management. Therefore, it is important and practically significant to explore and elucidate their magnificent implication and connotation.

References: (omitted)

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⁷ (1995). *The Educational Law of the People's Republic of China*. Chinese Educational Newspaper. 3.22